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## **World Health Organisation Ignored Hazards of Irradiated Foods, Declared Them Safe**

*New Report Includes Evidence that Serious Health Problems Dismissed; Emphasis  
Placed on Consumer Acceptance*

BRUSSELS – The World Health Organisation (WHO), which has declared irradiated foods safe for human consumption, has ignored a growing body of evidence clearly indicating otherwise. Despite this evidence, the WHO and other international agencies are working to expand the legalisation, commercialisation and consumer acceptance of irradiated foods throughout the world, says a report released today.

*Bad Taste: The Disturbing Truth About the World Health Organization's Endorsement of Food Irradiation* is being released as the European Parliament considers expanding the list of foods authorised for irradiation, to include dried fruit, cereal flakes, frog legs, peeled shrimp and several other foods. Currently, all but five EU countries only permit the irradiation of spices, herbs and vegetable seasonings.<sup>1</sup>

A prominent member of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy, which deliberates food irradiation policies for the European Union, recently stated “the WHO encourages the use of irradiation.” It is evident that the WHO’s dismissal of serious health implications associated with irradiated foods could now impact important decisions made in the EU.

“The WHO’s negligence could put at risk the health of millions of people throughout the world. These risks will only worsen if food supply systems further globalise,” said Wenonah Hauter, director of Public Citizen’s Critical Mass Energy and Environment Program. “By acting now, it is not too late to fend off a global health disaster.”

According to the report, the WHO has dismissed 50 years’ worth of research documenting a wide range of serious health problems in lab animals that ate irradiated foods, including premature death, mutations and nutritional deficiencies.<sup>2</sup>

The report exposes that despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the WHO proclaimed in 1999 that “treating” foods with radiation “does not result in any toxicological hazard.” This radiation comes in the form of gamma rays from radioactive cobalt-60 or cesium-137, or near-speed-of-light electrons fired by linear accelerators.

“The WHO’s job is to protect the health of the world’s citizens – not to use them as guinea pigs for experimental food products,” said Merav Shub of the UK Food Commission. “The WHO has no business promoting irradiated foods.”

An in-depth review of the WHO’s 40-plus-year assessment in determining if irradiated foods are safe for human consumption, reveals the following:

? The WHO has played a role in abandoning its original research agenda crafted in 1961, which urged comprehensive research on the basic human health implications of irradiated foods.<sup>3</sup>

? The WHO has played a role in dismissing recent evidence that cyclobutanones<sup>4</sup> promote the cancer-forming process in rats, cause the development of tumours and lesions in rats, and cause genetic damage in rats and in human cells.

? The WHO has ceded to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – whose mission is preserving the nuclear industry, not the health of people – the ultimate power of researching the safety of irradiated foods.

? The IAEA is leading a global campaign to further the legalisation, commercialisation and consumer acceptance of irradiated foods. “We must confer with experts in the various fields of advertising and psychology to put the public at ease,” one IAEA report states. “Any word or statement containing the word ‘radiation’ or ‘radiate’ should not be required on the label.”

? The WHO, IAEA and the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have misrepresented a vast body of research that revealed health problems in animals that ate irradiated foods, and stated instead that no such problems were attributable to irradiation. Furthermore, some research was outright omitted from key WHO reports.

Due to the reckless process by which the WHO, IAEA and FAO have endorsed food irradiation, Public Citizen and European consumer groups make the following recommendations:

? The WHO should promptly direct peer-reviewed research into the core safety and wholesomeness issues, including the presence of various toxic chemicals in irradiated foods.

? The WHO, IAEA and FAO should promptly withdraw its endorsement of irradiation for all foods at any dose, and refrain from recommending the further expansion of food irradiation.

? The United Nations should promptly appoint an independent panel of experts from the fields of toxicology, food science, radiation chemistry and nutrition to conduct a comprehensive review of the WHO, IAEA and FAO activities related to food irradiation.

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*To read or download Bad Taste, visit [www.citizen.org/cmep](http://www.citizen.org/cmep).*

#### **Notes to Editor**

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<sup>1</sup> These countries are Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Other health implications include, prenatal death and other reproductive problems, fatal internal bleeding, suppressed immune systems, organ damage, tumours, stunted growth

<sup>3</sup> The health implications of irradiated foods include whether these foods are toxic or radioactive; whether they could cause mutations, cancer or nutritional deficiencies; and to what extent nutrients are destroyed.

<sup>4</sup> Cyclobutanones have never been found to naturally occur in any food.